

Doubles or Nothing

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Vance Flynn stepped out onto the curb and smiled broadly, showing his perfect teeth. Behind him, the richest living steel heiress on the planet smoothed her lumpish behind, followed by a spandexed and muscle-shirted Filipino teen already known for modeling in underwear ads. Except that he seemed much taller.

Shutters erupted in a clicking frenzy.

Flynn walked on unperturbed, his perfect smile accentuating his perfect cheekbones and his perfect dimples. His pants were missing. He waved at all the photographers, just like the Queen of England would on a tour of the world.

It was just another sim-comp sighting, of course. Most people could tell even by the second or third time it happened. The real Vance Flynn was amused, the teen model's mother had a vigil at the local cathedral and threatened a lawsuit and the heiress in question was pilloried in the press. Still, the tabloids milked it for all it was worth and as long as they could.

Some of them even tried to pretend the originals passed themselves off as Dubs to avoid being held responsible for bad behaviour. « Now that sounds like a great idea », Vance Flynn would say. « Thanks for the tip! »

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The manicured lawn of DubCorp glittered with a fresh layer of water. It was exactly the right shade of emerald green, thought CEO Arne Langestrom with satisfaction as he ascended the steps four by four. Being the six-foot offspring of a basketball star came with certain quirks. Some were taken aback by the combination of his name, skin color, height, and background in both robotics and general marketing, added to the fact that he now controlled one of the fastest growing companies in North America. He enjoyed disconcerting such people.

As he made his way to the conference room, he mentally reviewed his notes and steeled himself for more hurtful questions, both voiced and unspoken, on the part of the few outsiders who had been granted access to the pep rally. It was necessary PR to have them there, he knew. Didn't he get the whole idea for DubCorp from his father's fame? Wasn't this some twisted way of getting back at an absent parent who used money to show affection, instead of being there for his child? Wasn't the fact that he used his mother's name proof of this? Arne reviewed how he'd replied to these allegations in the past. True enough, he was not very close to his father, who was a virtual stranger. However, the two were on speaking terms. To his knowledge, his famous dad, Cleveland Carter, had little to no objection to his DubCorp endeavours... End of official discussion.

His father had left his mother, a Swedish model, while she was still pregnant and he had been forced into a paternity test. He'd paid child support reluctantly and visited without showing any particular feeling. Okay, maybe there was residual resentment. However, DubCorp was a brilliant concept with or without Cleveland Carter and his relationship to his son.

Arne reached the conference room with time to spare. That was how he liked it. He nodded to the sound engineers and tested the mikes, then set up his viewer and checked his overheads. Nothing was left to chance in his world, not even for the most routine events and presentations. He looked out at the sea of faces in front of him and checked the atomic clock on his viewer.

Time.

“Ladies and gentlemen – good day. I’d like to welcome the investors, new employees and of course, those of you who have been with us for a while as well. For those of you who work here and haven’t met me, allow me to introduce myself. I’m your Chief Executive Officer here at DubCorp, Arne Langestrom.”

He was interrupted temporarily by thunderous applause, and smiled the self-deprecating smile of the conquering hero.

“Before I begin, I’d like to take you back a bit to how DubCorp even became possible. As some of you know, in a historic landmark decision 15 years ago, the Supreme Court ruled human likenesses were not patentable except by God. That’s the only reason Dubs, or other sim-comps, are allowed under trade law. The only reason they’re profitable is because they’re copies of fantasies people have of the famous and beautiful, since humaniform robots never became viable as human likenesses otherwise.

As you know, or as you should know, DubCorp is the premier manufacturer of simulated companions to a select clientele everywhere in the world. We have captured 75 % of the international sim-comp market so far. Our growth is exploding and shows no signs of slowing down. Unlike our competitors, we have far less than a 1 % defective behavior rate in our models and have successfully replicated human examples from all sectors: sports, film, music, modeling, adult entertainment, news and television, even business and science. I hear I’m next in line.” A few catcalls and wolf whistles greeted the last remark. As he spoke, his overheads filled with animations and projected them to the audience.

“Each model is a limited edition and can only be sold to a limited clientele. This will never be a mass market. We don’t want it to be. We can’t flood society with Dubs. Not everyone can have one. That will kill the market. We’re selling a fantasy. We have to sell it dear.”

He switched gears.

“In real life, finding a soul mate is hard. In fact, it’s almost impossible. For the very rich, it’s especially so. We offer them a way to do it. Our Dubs are programmed to be the perfect companions. To a face and a body they already love, we add all the compatibility they could want: the same taste in music, the same values, the same languages, the same outlook. Satisfaction is guaranteed. The best part is: no marriage, therefore, no divorce, no prenup, no alimony and of course, the Dub will never leave unless you want it to go. The Dub never ages, never loses interest, adapts his or her interests along with the client’s, and never dies. Of course, if the client so wishes, the Dub’s age can be adjusted along with the client’s, to keep pace, so to speak, for a fee. We can also provide variations in case of boredom, for a higher fee, but for less than the price of a new model. This is truly the perfect companion. Better, in fact, than the original.”

A chorus of titters resounded throughout the audience.

“I see you agree with me on this last point,” said Arne, his smile stretched out very, very large.

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“Ooo! Vance! Stop, I can’t breathe, you’re too funny!”

To lend credence to her statement, the sequined and bejeweled blonde bent her sinewy frame, laughed and hyperventilated for a full minute before standing up again. She turned to the carefully coiffed and manicured film star throwing dice next to her at the dimly-lit crimson table.

“Those poor Dubs can’t last much longer with you around!”

Vance Flynn grinned once again: “No wonder every ‘bloid thinks I’ve been dating 15 different women this week. Turns out I have been!”

Another chorus of titters greeted the bon mot, along with the rattle of dice.

A more somber voice interrupted the general good cheer. The younger hanger-on was a set-designer, arty, stuffy, obviously smitten with stardom and desperate to impress. His name was Wolfe.

“I wouldn’t be so quick to dismiss the whole Dub phenom. I think they’re here to stay and they could have unforeseen consequences, for good or bad. So far, depending on how you see it, all the Dub sightings are either great for you because they fool the ‘bloids and lead them on a wild goose chase; or they’re a headache instead, because they make it look like you’re doing something you’re not, especially if it’s something that makes you look bad. Maybe it’s up to you to choose how to see things. That would be great. But maybe it will get out of hand. What’s to stop these guys from getting a union card and taking your jobs – and your salaries along with them?”

“Their microchips, for one thing,” Vance shot back. “They’re programmed to please. Definitely not star material. At least, nothing like dear old moi! The ruse would be uncovered in a split-second. And they would have to be put up to it, since they would never think of it on their own.”

With these last words, Vance shook the dice once more, rolled, and lost. But then, he lost often. He shrugged. “There goes another one. Guess my financial babysitter’ll have to settle things in the morning.”

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Lindsay Moore shook her head, rubbed her eyes, yawned and mumbled. “Another day, another million... Or two. Or four. Or whatever.” She chuckled and rolled her head from side to side sleepily. Her dad could figure all that out, so she wouldn’t have to. She looked at the calendar again where the magic date was circled in bright red marker. Just one more day until B-Day and the present of her dreams: a top-model Dub of Vance Flynn. Hers would be fully customized with extra body hair, green eyes and a tenor singing voice, in addition to all standard masculine enhancements provided by the factory. She could already see the distinctive bright green Dub van with its Ultra quality logo. Sure, there were knock-offs. But anyone who wanted to avoid embarrassments got the originals: only the best, tested 10,000 times under shock conditions. They were discreet, undetectable, satisfaction guaranteed.

The bedroom was in disarray as usual. Lindsay took in the piles of jeans, skirts, dresses and blouses on the floor, desk and chairs at a glance. Her mother’s disapproving voice echoed in her head: “Pick those things up before the maid gets her, Lindsay! We don’t want the help to spread gossip in the ‘bloids about what pigs we are!” She smiled. Now she was in her very own luxury apartment, even if it was all paid by daddy. No one could tell her to pick up anything. And the maid got enough money to know which side her bread was buttered on so she wouldn’t tell any secrets.

Of course, once her own custom-made Vanny got there, she could make him pick up her underwear. That would be a big turn-on.

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“What do you mean, you don’t have it? I’m rich! I’m famous! I’m Vance fucking Flynn! I’m always in the papers! And I owe five fucking million dollars! I have to pay! You don’t know these people! They’re not the type you want to cross!”

Vance stood in front of his financial manager, sweating, his eyes bulging, a vein in his temple throbbing, all of which were so uncharacteristic as to render his interlocutor speechless for a span of ten seconds, as his eyes shifted rapidly up and down and especially along his desk, as he gripped it. Kevin DesMoines was the type to feel guilty even when he wasn’t, and had done nothing, in fact, to deserve any ensuing opprobrium.

“Um, Mr. Flynn...” The financial expert swallowed, his throat dry once again. He cursed his luck, since this particular client didn’t add any more to the bottom line than he justified by the aggravation he created. “You must realize that since you’ve turned down the last five script offers you’ve had, and the last ten endorsements, and with alimony and child support to your three former spouses and four children, it doesn’t matter much how often the ‘bloids write you up, exactly. It doesn’t translate into actual cash...”

Vance was livid. In fact, he appeared to be turning purple. “But there’s always someone interested in making a deal with me! It’s only a matter of time! And what about residuals? There must be residuals coming in from somewhere, for something!”

Kevin DesMoines was trained to sound apologetic. “I’m sorry, Mr. Flynn, really I am. Of course things will be resolving themselves soon. But I’m afraid there are no incoming residuals. Your agent neglected to negotiate them. There’s no new income to cover the debt.”

He glanced up from his ledger just in time to see his client stomp out of the office in a fury.

“Five million. Where am I going to get five fucking million?” Vance Flynn screamed at no one in particular. he kicked at a tin can rusting in the alley in front of him. A few startled bystanders stared, then hurried away.

A chirpy cha-cha resounded in Lance’s pocket. He grabbed his phone, his mouth dry. “Hello?” He was suddenly quiet and still with the exception of his hands shaking. The voice at the other end was so soft Vance had to strain to hear it. Or would have. Except he knew exactly what the voice had to say: “One more day. Or Vance Flynn does things for us that maybe Vance Flynn really, really won’t like to do.” The phone went dead.

Vance broke into a cold sweat. He stood rooted to the sidewalk, oblivious to the gawkers around him. Suddenly, he turned to a staring middle-aged woman and nodded. His eyes glistened. “Oh, they won’t break my legs, not at first, you know. They’ll give me more of a choice,” he said. She listened carefully. After all, he was the star of Freedom Joe I, II and III, one of the most bitstreamed men on the planet, even now, though he hadn’t made a picture in several years; he was replicated everywhere, not to mention Dubbed. The only reason he and his fellow stars hadn’t been dna’ed was the Supreme Court ruling that cloning babies from discarded genetic material left on handkerchiefs and other such items found in garbage cans was, in fact, a little beyond the pale... although there was no telling what had been done illegally so far.

Vance continued. “See, first of all, I’m too valuable to them. I’m worth a lot more to them alive and kicking than crippled. But there’s just one little problem with the things they’ll have me do. There’ll be no going back. I’ll be done. I’m going to be one giant washing machine for them but the smell is never going to wash off of me. And that’s only going to be the start. I’ll never be rid of them.”

The middle-aged woman clutched her hand-bag earnestly and peered into Vance's eyes with her head at an angle, as if listening attentively to a wayward relative. "Mr. Flynn, I'm sure things can't be all that bad. Pray to the good Lord God and trust in the miraculous Power of Jesus." She reached out and placed a hand which she no doubt meant to be reassuring on Vance's arm.

He recoiled as if touched by fire and shuddered. He hated to be touched by strangers. He also hated religious fanatics. He stepped back quickly, then turned and walked away from her without any reply.

The sky was leaden. It started to rain. She called out to him: "Jesus loves all sinners, even you!" He kept walking.

Only miles to go before I sleep, he thought, bitterly.

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The set was crowded already, thought Wolfe with annoyance. Visitors? They had enough problems, with the director ordering changes to his very creation so far. His interiors for *Ready to Die* were not 1990ish enough, apparently, and needed a more Southwestern Navajo touch. His colors were too pastel. The list went on *ad nauseam*. Now strangers would be underfoot.

Wolfe peered out to see the intruders. He started and spoke to a wardrobe assistant next to him. "Look! It's that robotics guru Arne Langestrom and the biggest billionaire in the country, Jameson Moore!" The wardrobe assistant chattered excitedly back: "Omigod, that man has his finger in every boom industry in the country. It's like he's got a psychic on payroll! He never misses a money-maker. And Dubs are huge these days. They must be here to Dub Angelica Lamour and Marlon Sable. Are those two ever going to be pissed?"

Wolfe nodded. "I hear Marlon got bitstreamed 1.3 billion times after he starred in *The Saucy Egg*. It might have been arthouse but it made his career. Women love that stuff – 19th-century English working class coming-of-age stories."

No doubt the studio was granting access to study, maybe replicate, both actors for a cut of the profits.

Suddenly the unmistakably husky voice of the principle actress rose in a crescendo:

"How can you let these people through to gawk at us? How can you make money from this and leave us with nothing?"

The producer, Robert Kruger, was in the process of steering his august guests. Unfazed, he replied:

"Nothing? You're getting paid 100 million for this picture. That should cover just about anything. And it seems you forgot to sign a clause in your contract including Dub-related rights on set. As it stands, as long as you work for me, anything you generate within the work environment, including your image, belongs to the production company. Therefore, I can do what I like with it today. Or any day. Look it up: it's in *Caylan Moore Films vs Adnan Hollinger*, Supreme Court of California. In future, if you care to split the difference with us. We can work out an arrangement. Not now."

Angelica Lamour shook her considerable raven mane, and her fists, let out a growl that was partway grunt, and skulked off to her trailer. The producer sighed.

Meanwhile, Jameson Moore was deep in conversation with Arne Langestrom. Off to the side, Wolfe listened with interest. "Lindsay can't wait, I assure you. This is the best present I could

have possibly given her. I don't know how many boyfriends she's gone through since she's been sixteen, including every steel, coal, diamond and textile heir I've been able to find, but none of them were good enough. Giving her Vance Flynn – no, better! A younger Vance Flynn, and just the way she likes him! Well, that's more than a father could hope for. I won't have to worry about any fortune hunters again, at least. Our fortune is safe for good. So, Mr. Langestrom, you have a father's gratitude. My daughter's birthday's just tomorrow..."

Their footsteps receded as Wolfe glanced after them. The set designer thought back to the gambling tables. He had Vance Flynn on speed dial, the star not being all that particular about who in his immediate entourage had access or not to his private number. Wouldn't he think it was a scream that the daughter of a major billionaire was getting him Dubbed? This was news. Wolfe dialed, grinning.

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The rained had slowed to a mist. Vance's cotton sweater clung to his torso as rivulets of water streamed from his hair. He felt numb. His phone rang again, the cha-cha beat relentlessly cheerful against the battleship grey tones around him. Mechanically, he collected the message.

"Hi Vance." The ingratiating tone of the set designer's voice grated on his last nerve. He was about to shut his phone off, then thought: what the hell. What better things do you have to do today. He listened to the rest. "You'll never guess who showed up on set today and what's going on..."

A Dub. Of him. tomorrow. Which meant a Dub delivery van... Vance felt his pulse quicken with sudden hope. But first, he needed to know exactly when that van would be there and where that house was.

This was a good time to let his fingers do a cha-cha of their own. He fished his phone out and started dialing. Despite his self-imposed temporary exile, he still had some of the biggest stars on his speed dial. One of them had to know Lindsay Moore, or someone who knew her. And most stars hated Dubs even when they pretended not to care.

As he dialed, he grumbled irritably: "It figures. You wouldn't think of calling your friends to try and meet me in person. Oh, no! A robot is sooooo much better, isn't it? No muss, no fuss, no possibility of rejection, babe. But good for me, 'cause your love of robotic friends is going to get me out of a very bad jam and into hiding, so what am I complaining about?... Sareena? Honey! It's Vance! Kiss, kiss, kiss, beautiful! Listen, I'm calling not only because you deserve a hello for being Bollywood gorgeous, but also because I will shower you with eternal gratitude if you help me out. You know Lindsay Moore? Well, she's getting a Dub of me. That's right. Those things are everywhere, aren't they? And I think it's gone far enough. How would you like to help me play a hell of a practical joke on the girl?..."

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Lindsay Moore waved away the designer after choosing her favourites. The red party gown would be perfect for her birthday bash today. She found herself defending her decisions on the phone.

"Mom, I had to explain about the Dub. Sareena called and said she wanted to throw me a birthday party! Isn't she nice? I know it's really last minute, but apparently she just found out

when my birthday was, so now we want to make sure the party's after my present comes. That way I get to make sure he works right and with any luck, he could even come with me! So I told her what time the delivery was, so she could plan the party."

As her mother replied, Lindsay nodded, her face twisted in a slightly puzzled expression. "Well, I know Sareena's never been really all that close and she's a bit older, but none of my friends are throwing me any parties! I guess they could be surprising me though. We were going to go clubbing but we can still do that later. We'll just put Vanny in the closet with the vacuum. Or we could take him along for laughs. I guess that's why I got him."

Her mother sounded like she was wagging her finger on the other end of the line. "Honey, as soon as you get a new toy, you put it away. Now you're planning on putting it away even before you get it!"

Lindsay sighed. "Oh, mom. No, I won't. I'll have lots of fun with Vanny. I promise, I promise, I promise!"

Her mother sounded stern. "I certainly hope so, young lady. That's a five-million dollar man. Now, I know we're billionaires, but you still have to learn the value of a dollar."

A beep indicated another call. "Hello. It's DubCorp. We'll be there in approximately 45 minutes with your cargo."

The young woman squealed. "That is so great!! I'll be right here!"

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"I... I won't lose my licence over this or anything, will I?"

Vance Flynn raised his hands in a soothing gesture: "Of course not. It's all in good fun. See there?" He pointed to Wolfe, equipped with a camera he'd borrowed from the set of *Ready to Die*. "That's a cameraman from *What a Life!* No one ever gets fired for participating on the show. I'm guesting as a host for them, because that's my Dub you've got there! We're going to play a little joke on Miz Moore. Nothing serious. I switch places with the Dub. I go into the box and you deliver me. The Dub takes the mike and follows Wolfe here. No harm, no foul. It's only for a short prank. We'll fix everything after you've gone back.

The driver's initial skepticism evaporated quickly under Vance's persuasive powers. The plan whirled into motion.

Vance gritted his teeth as he was jostled unceremoniously in his wooden crate out of the green truck and up to the building elevator.

Meanwhile, model J-1684 stood unblinking in front of Wolfe, with unnaturally white teeth, extra body hair, a tenor voice and an encyclopedic knowledge of Dover Boys trivia, down to the time they sang "God Bless the Queen" in perfect pitch for Remembrance Day celebrations five years before and shattered bitstream records for the month on any channel. Wolfe harrumphed and repeated instructions from Vance. "Right. Go to 1544 Ocean View Boulevard. Here are the keys – car, and house. This is your house. Do what you are told when someone calls you. Or when people tell you things in person. Now... go!"

J-1684 finally blinked, took the keys and headed for the address in question in the car pointed out to him, with an appropriate screech of tires. After all, he was Vance Flynn. They had programmed some of the original's personality into him. Not too much, but just enough.

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Lindsay jumped at the door with an ear-splitting smile and a shout that resonated down the hall. “Vannnyyyyyyy!”

The driver reddened as she opened to receive her delivery and signed for it in a breathless whirl. The tip was impressive. His eyes widened. He stuttered out his thanks, backed away and stumbled back with his packing material, leaving his customer with her present.

And Vance Flynn, superstar, found himself face to face with his new owner: 21-year old billionaire heiress Lindsay Moore.

She pranced forward and hugged him as she would a life-sized doll, squealing once again, then stepped back, jumping up and down, as she pumped his arms in a swinging arc.

“Vanny Vanny Vannnyyy! This is the absolute best best best present I’ve ever ever had!”

She twirled like a ballerina, clapped her hands together, and peered rapturously into his eyes. Then frowned.

“Your eyes are blue! I said to make them green!”

Vance Flynn felt a thin film of sweat break out on his forehead. He hoped it looked dewy and natural. Manly and attractive.

The young heiress rolled up the actor’s sleeve and unbuttoned his shirt. His lasered torso gleamed under the condo lights. Lindsay was not pleased. “Hairless! I wanted hair! I said body hair! They got it all wrong!” she whined.

Vance hung his head in what he hoped was Dub-like submission. “I’m sorry. I aim to please! He chirped. “Please don’t take me back. I will make you love me!”

Lindsay waved at him imperiously. “Well, I can’t take you back before Sareena’s party. You’re my escort. I’m stuck with you for now. We’ll see about a return later. They’ll have to fix you, at least. Including that voice of yours. It’s supposed to sound a lot more natural. And I wanted a tenor, like Andy from the Dover Boys!”

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J-1684 arrived at the Flynn mansion on Ocean View boulevard with an expert hand on the wheel, gliding into the garage smoothly.

He stepped into the house with only the hum and whir of electric appliances to greet him. Once in the living room, he sat in darkness. There was no need for light. He had no need to see, nor did he feel any desire to do so.

The phone rang. He remembered his instructions and picked up. It was Wolfe: “Vance!” J-1684 answered: “Yes?” Wolfe continued: “Listen. You have to take the cell phone in your jacket pocket and make sure it’s turned on. Then, you have to check your messages. The code is 12345. Your original was never careful that way.” The set designer hung up abruptly.

J-1684 complied. An angry voice emerged from the message center: “Mr. Flynn, I see you’ve chosen not to honor your end of the bargain. You understand you’ll be paying interest. We’ll be paying you a visit very soon to discuss your services, so don’t you go anywhere.”

In fact, J-1684 had no intention of moving unless and until told to do so.

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Lindsay Moore was running back and forth, dressed in a black lace bra and panties, looking for her slip, fussing over her red gown.

“Oh, I know I didn’t put it in the wash yet! Vanny! Go look in the laundry room. It’s a black lace slip, full-length!”

At this point, despite her petulant tone of voice, Vance Flynn was enjoying the view. A bit too much. He wondered if Dubs had spontaneous erections. Probably not. “Yes, Lindsay! Of course, I will! It’s my pleasure.” He said it in his best tenor. He hoped it was tenor. He didn’t want it adjusted. And off he went to the laundry room. And indeed, there was the black lace, full-length slip. It shimmered. It slinked. It smelled like an exotic and musky and very feminine perfume. His erection got harder. He fixed the smile on his face that much more, took the slip and draped it across both his arms, and thought of the torture awaiting him as he was adjusted to her specifications should he fail to escape as planned. Things got limper fast. He emerged back into the living-room.

“Oooo! Thank you!”

Lindsay wiggled into her slip, then into her gown. She whirled in front of her mirror, smoothing the fabric, and eyed herself critically. Then, slowly but expertly, she applied her makeup. Once she was done, Vance had to admit she was stunning. Had he not been confined to the part of a robot, he would have been proud to be her date. Hell, he would have bragged about her to all his friends and would have welcomed all and any pictures from the paparazzi of the two of them – not something he normally tended to think. As it was, he was only a mechanical servant.

Then again, he was there to be used. She was going to use him later. Dubs were usually for sex. She was young but he’d had younger. Uh oh. Later, he hissed to himself, growing red and hoping she wouldn’t turn to look. It took all the training he had to regain his composure as the heiress fixed her gaze on him.

“Time to go, love! Sareena’s waiting. She’s being super-good to me so you’ll be on your best Dub behavior, alright?”

“Yes, Lindsay, of course I will!” Vance replied effusively. Lindsay turned and led him out.

Sareena’s home overhung a cliff, with a spectacular view and several acres of land including a mango orchard. Flower gardens and hothouses added to the overall effect. Inside, the hostess had several reception rooms, decorated by continental theme. Lindsay’s birthday party would start in the African room, then go to the Asian room, the European room and finally, the Americas room.

Sareena herself greeted them in a deep blue sari, with banghra music playing in the background. The music was contagious, and Lindsay found she was dancing to it instinctively. Sareena laughed in delight. “Perhaps you’d like a lesson in banghra dancing for your birthday?” Lindsay clapped her hands. “That sounds like fun. Maybe we could all have one!” Sareena nodded. “It sounds like a great idea. Let’s wait until more guests arrive.”

Out of the corner of his eye, Vance looked at Lindsay and wished he could smile fondly. He could. Her mouth would form a perfect O. She would arch her eyebrows. At best, she would find it strange. At worst, she would strongly suspect something was up, maybe even that a human lookalike had switched places with her Dub. These things had been reported before. Being the plaything of a billionaire didn’t seem such a bad lot. Especially the sex. Especially with someone like Lindsay Moore. And so, Vance kept to his script: vapid, speaking when spoken to. Eyeing kept to a minimum, with no surprises.

The impromptu banghra lesson was a great success, with everyone enjoying the slides, steps and arm movements. In fact, it was the social glue of the afternoon before dinner. The cake was lavish

and very pink, which was Lindsay's favorite color.

After the party was over, Lindsay hugged Sareena for a long time and said, in a small voice: "Thank you. No one's every really done anything like this for me just because. Not without daddy paying for it. It means a lot to me."

Sareena was touched. So was Vance. He clamped his jaw shut to stop all show of emotion. Sareena glanced at him but abstained from betraying any reproach.

It was time for Lindsay to go clubbing with her friends. "My mom says I should take Vanny, so he's coming with us," Lindsay explained. Shrieks and peals of laughter greeted the announcement. "Well, that's what he's for! said Zaina, a friend of Lindsay's since high school and one of the most adventurous in the group. "Time to go out and party!"

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As J-1684 sat in the dark, the doorbell rang. He switched on the lights, mindful of the humans, and answered the door. A trio of carefully-dressed men, in casual but expensive clothes, confronted the Dub. One stood at the front, his hands folded in front of him, head cocked to one side. His thinning hair was red and his eyes blue. His expression was grim. Both men behind him were dark and swarthy. One was beetle-browed. The other scowled as he examined his nails. The ringleader spoke:

"Well, Mr. Flynn. You were expecting us. Good. You didn't fly the coop this time. You're learning what's good for you."

He stepped aside, causing J-1684 to step back and let him in. The two others followed, their movements in unison. The leader spoke again: "You're going to learn a bit more of what's good for you tonight. You're hosting a party. I realize it's a bit last minute, but my friends and I need a nice, clean venue that's above suspicion, not been watched by police, as it were. This is just the ticket. Don't worry about a thing. We'll bring our own drinks and food. Just be ready to answer the door. And help out with the service."

With these words, the redheaded visitor turned and left. His two henchmen glowered at J-1684 for good measure and followed suit.

Once they were gone, the Dub turned off the lights again. He was programmed to save energy. Then, he returned to sit down, which he was programmed to do to stay out of the way. He waited.

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Lindsay and Zaina had both kicked off their shoes and were whirling like dervishes in their expensive gowns on the dance floor of the Metropolis. Just like the ones in the film, the club had silver robots lining the walls. The décor was Art Nouveau. It was Lindsay's favorite. There was even a recreated "bouche de métro" from the streets of Paris, for the ladies' and men's room. The effect was lavish, decadent and just perfect for a 21st birthday celebration.

Unfortunately, thought Vance with a forced plastered grin on his face, it was not so perfect for an escape plan for a fake Dub. There was no cover due to the industrial, stylized design, too few crowds, and no plants. He felt his hope wither. The only thing left was staff... if somehow he could switch places with a busboy. He shook his head at the foolishness of his idea. Who would believe a busboy was a Vance Flynn Dub? Or that Vance Flynn was a busboy? His shoulders sagged. Escape was not on the menu tonight.

Back at the condo, Vance's brooding was relieved by thoughts of upcoming entertainment. However, Lindsay shimmied out of her gown, slip, bra and undies and, in her naked splendor, unceremoniously dumped him in the utility closet next to the vacuum cleaner in a rare display of domesticity – to get him out of the way. He fumed. His erection fumed. He swivelled his head toward the vacuum cleaner. "Hi there. I'm Vance. Been here long?"

#

Redhead returned to Ocean View boulevard with his two friends, as promised, along with a steady stream of helpers bearing gifts of beer, wine, vodka and many other spirits. Food followed in copious quantities. There were tapas and shrimp cocktails, spring rolls, satay, then chicken à la king, pasta, Chinese food and curry. Waiters circulated. J-1684 was told to make himself useful. Redhead gloated as he gave the order.

The Dub nodded and did as he was told. Once everything was ready and the guests started to arrive, the redheaded man turned to J-1684 and changed his instructions:

"It's time for you to entertain the guests. After all, you're Vance Flynn. It's part of the draw. They're not just here for a safe house. Show them a good time. Though you'd better stay away from the women if they're taken. Of course, you wouldn't be that stupid, now would you, Mr. Flynn?"

J-1684 cocked his head, his eyes widened in the very picture of innocence. "Of course, I wouldn't. I'm sure the ladies will issue all appropriate instructions." His interlocutor sneered in response. "You've got a point, there. I'll be keeping an eye out on them, as well. But in the meantime, please entertain. Can you sing?" J-1684 replied: "Yes, I know every song from the Dover Boys." Red nodded, beaming. "Perfect!" He clapped. "Microphone please!" J-1684 crooned in perfect imitation of the Dover Boys lead singer. Around him a crowd gathered.

Two women in particular eyed the Vance Flynn lookalike and oooed and aaahed. They were dressed in nearly identical pleatherine skirts with neon fur-trimmed tees. Both wore heavy make-up. Their perma-false eyelashes fluttered forcefully. They tapped their pedicured and twice-lacquered toes, encased in Choogucci Airsandals. They pursed their formal lips and airkissed him lasciviously.

As soon as his set was done, J-1684 snapped into Flirtation Mode Level One: Bantering Engagement, as written into his program to imitate the best of Vance Flynn's charm. His eyelashes fluttered at intervals of one point two seconds as his voice modulated into more open, then more closed intonations, to sound more suggestive. He made it more caressing, more purring. His eyebrows wiggled. He used double-entendres.

The women – Candi and Sandi – lapped it up. Lucky for him, both were single. No broken legs tonight, he whispered to Red. That's right, Red whispered back. But there might still be trouble. Trouble? What trouble? J-1684 enquired. Check out those two, said Red with an elbow into the Dub's ribs. And J-1684 took a look.

Candi and Sandi were busy pulling each other's hair. "I saw him first!" shrieked Sandi, of the red pleatherine. "No, you didn't! Just because you said ooo first doesn't mean you spotted him before I did, you bitch!" Candi's knee came up high and swift. Sandi crumpled, whimpering.

Red intervened before any blood was shed and any more bruising occurred. "Woah! This is a peaceful gathering, ladies. For your chance with the handsome Vance Flynn, you'll have to win him without bloodshed! Through an auction! Give your money to a good cause."

Candi sneered, deprived of her chance to finish off her opponent: “A good cause – yeah, right. The good cause is your pocket and nothing else!” Red chuckled. “Why don’t you just bid and enjoy, lady?”

#

The morning found Vance bleary-eyed but none the worse for wear – and still hopeful, broom-closet notwithstanding. He waited. And waited. No Lindsay. No hint of Lindsay. No hint of young females waiting for such as himself to satisfy them whatsoever.

Why in the world had she ordered him? As a novelty? No doubt. She wanted to keep up with the other billionaires and not get anything cheap. Her Dub was the best quality. He had seen as much. Nothing that would malfunction and create an embarrassment. He simmered at the thought. Why not. Let him be recalled. He could no doubt easily evade factory protocols, designed for mindless robots and not to contain escaping humans.

Let it be so. The only missing element was the opportunity. He thought of the heiress and his pantless lookalike in her wake. Surely, he could do better than that... Confined to the dark dusty recesses of his closet prison, he dreamt up various ways of going awry at the worst possible time for his posh princess proprietor. At a gala dinner, he could undress her systematically, stopping only when others intervened. Or he could dry-hump her in full view of all guests, dressed or not. He could also undress himself. Shame was not a problem. He had lost all of it long ago. Besides, he was a Dub now. No one would suspect otherwise. Shame wouldn’t enter the picture. This was a part like any other. Correction: a part unlike any other, since his bloody life depended on it. If he got to play it, of course. That was the question. Would she ever take him out again?

He inhaled more dust from the broom closet and sneezed. He began to despair.

#

J-1684 rotated on a platform specially made for the occasion. “I’ve got 50 thousand – do I hear 60? Sixty for Vance Flynn; a date with the inimitable Vance Flynn? Premier actor of film here in this fair land? One incredible night? Come on: you can do better than that!”

Noises proliferated. “There we go! All right! Seventy-five! One hundred. One twenty-five! One fifty!” The platform continued to rotate. The price rose again. Five hundred thousand. Red’s voice rasped out: “Do I hear five fifty? Five hundred thousand. Going once. Twice... Sold! To the lovely lady in the red pleatherine!”

Sandi squealed in delight and jumped up in triumph. Candi howled in protest. Red moved forward, his arms crossed, scowling at Candi with just the right hint of menace. Candi hissed and frowned, shrinking away in defeat.

Red turned to J-684 and smiled as he brought down the gavel hard. “Well, well, Mr. Flynn. You got yourself a date tonight! We thank you all for your contribution to the cause!”

The platform stopped. J-1684 stepped away toward his chosen escort. Sandi eyed him appraisingly and held out her arm. He took it, the picture of the perfect gentleman.

#

The closet door swung open. Lindsay was clad in underwear only, her breasts swinging

nonchalantly as she stood with her hand on her hip. Vance's pupils widened. He hardened and prayed the shadows would hide it.

"Hmmm. Playtime."

Then again, maybe not. Her voice was kittenish. She took both his hands and yanked at them. He stumbled forward and against her.

"We're going to play Tri-Word!"

He froze. Oh, shit. Of course. Soon the shadows had nothing to hide, courtesy of three-letter words you can spell with the letter zee, piled onto two letter words featuring the letters J and K, respectively. In the Yarwellian dialect, since, according to Lindsay rules, this was allowed. In different variants; which were not at all misspellings but nuances of Yarwellian culture. There. And since when did a Dub argue so much anyway? And since when was her Dub, in particular, programmed to know anything about Yarwellian spelling? Lindsay pouted in her panties. Even her nipples frowned. The more she pouted, the more Vance wanted to throw his cover: his hand reached for the board, almost overturning it. It took a superhuman effort of self-restraint not to lunge forward. Patience. The word simmered somewhere past the limbic reaches of his brain. Patience.

Lindsay crossed her arms over her full, bare and youthful breasts. And pouted once more. "Tri-Word is no fun with you if you're going to argue with me over every single detail of Yarwellian spelling and culture. I want to do something else." She batted her eyelashes and looked him up and down as she rubbed her hands up and down her legs, then up further, on her abdomen, and torso. She licked her lips.

Finally, thought Vance.

#

J-1684 emerged from the LamborW-TT-DDD unscathed, smiling and singing in tune, quite a feat considering the navigational skills, or lack thereof, exhibited by Sandi. His prizegetter wrangled him by the collar into her bedroom. "Heel!" she practically hissed at him. J-1684 obeyed, with a lithe docility that masked the glassy-eyed mechanical response most initial female customers had reported as a turn-off in first-generation Dubs. Sandi smirked, satisfied. "You're not so high and mighty now, are you, Mister Flynn?" she sneered, showing small and even pearly white teeth. Her breath came quick and shallow. Her eyes glittered. She straddled him. J-1684 adopted the vulnerable, subjugated look, proven popular with over 96% of test market female subjects queried by DubCorp before market launch. Of course, the test market female subjects were of the alpha variety one and all, billionaires only. A small, but highly relevant, sample.

#

At 33 years of age, Vance Flynn thought of himself as being in the prime of life. He needed every bit of that prime now, he saw clearly. Rivers of sweat ran down his face and neck. Ruefully, he reflected that his Dub would not have this function. As he recalled, most women the age of Lindsay were less... mature. Must be the uninhibited exercise of power that liberated the libido so much. And so often. Had his vanity not impeded his enjoyment, his nirvana would have been complete. But it was more than vanity, he reflected: fear of discovery made his hands tremble as he wiped the sweat from himself furtively between couplings. Lindsay seemed oblivious. So far.

He smiled at her as plastically as he believed he should, without overdoing it. DubCorp was too sophisticated for that. She purred.

“You’re worth every penny. And you’re not going back in that broom closet. I don’t even know if I want you away long enough for those factory adjustments. Maybe you’re just fine.”

Vance willed himself not to break into another sweat. He turned away slightly and heaved a sigh of relief, yet braced himself for a marathon. What if it was all too much? She was still young. Never mind that in women it didn’t matter until they hit their menopause. In his case, he could falter in a way a Dub never would. He took a quick look under the sheet to verify his state of readiness. As Lindsay’s head turned, his own was looking frantically about for an escape that did not exist.

She reached for him. He smiled again, willing himself to be relaxed and seductive, the way he had a thousand times before. It was the role of a lifetime. And he was playing for his life. He just had to find a way out – before he was found out. And soon.

#

J-1684 was back at 1544 Ocean View boulevard. His hair in disarray, he stood shirtless as he emerged from the LamborW-TT-DDD and entered the house. Sandi had the valet escort him for her. “It was fun, lover. Now it’s done.” And she’d laughed. Stridently. Like a horse. Dutifully, J-1684 had blinked and nodded in a submissive manner. Unfortunately, her response to this was not written into code. As a result, J-1684’s shirt was somewhere on an unknown overpass and his hair was a mess. More fortunately, these were problems that could be remedied. What puzzled J-1684 were the unknown variables surrounding his interaction with Sandi. Defects in his program. He knew he could be sent back to the factory or much worse, if the problem were not solved, or even decommissioned entirely. He could not be defective. He had to be perfectly responsive to all human desires. Or else.

Inside the house, Red and two thugs awaited. They were headquartered here now, having taken over the bedrooms as their own, with others as offices.

“Vanny! How are ya! Or should I ask – it looks like ya had yourself a whale of a time, there!” Red slapped him on the back with a broad wink, guffawing sarcastically to the other two.

J-1684, incapable of shame or humiliation, fixed him with a limpid and candid stare:

“I’m fine. How are you? I’ll go to my room now.”

Red shifted his weight. “Well, now. We’ve got an evening planned and you’re part of it. See, it’s a card-playing evening and we want you circulating amongst the guests. We also have some business to discuss, as we’ll be needing your services for a, shall we say, special project...”

J-1684 nodded, his programming primed. “I’ll be there.” Red grinned, mollified. “That’ll be peachy.”

#

Lindsay was out for a few hours, shopping. Vance breathed a sigh of relief. Time to formulate a plan. He reached for the viewphone and called Wolfe: “You’ve got to get me out of here,” he hissed. “I don’t know how much longer I can keep her fooled.” On the other end of the line, the set designer hemmed and hawed. “Well, what did you have in mind?” Vance shot back: “I need to pick your brains on this one, Wolfe. I’m trapped in here. She put me in a broom closet the night of

her birthday, for Pete's sake. I don't know what she's going to do next, especially if she starts to catch on that I'm not her robot. Think! Can you be like a delivery man or something? I don't know!"

Wolfe paused, then answered in a flash of inspiration: "I've got it! I'll say I'm from DubCorp. I can get a uniform from the company by pretending it's for the movie or a practical joke, or something like that. I'll buzz her, or I can phone first then show up, and explain we found a defect in your hardware and you have to get fixed up right away. I'll take you with me and you'll be out of there. All you have to do is start malfunctioning a little after I make the phone call. Don't do it beforehand because she might call the company instead of waiting for me."

Vance nodded, his voice hopeful: "That sounds like it could work! By the time she phones DubCorp to find out what's happened to her Dub, I could be on a plane to South America, in the Amazon or something where no one will ever find me... Call her in three hours. She'll be back by then. And Wolfe – I really owe you one."

#

Red twirled his drink slowly, then looked down at J-1684, who sat on the couch in a leisurely attitude copied from several composite scenes of Vance Flynn movies. "Mr. Flynn, the guests will be coming in soon. But first, it's time to give you your instructions on our next endeavor. You know Lindsay Moore, the billionaire's daughter, do you not?" J-1684 nodded vigorously. "Of course I do. She's beautiful, smart, talented and rich – all that a man could hope for."

Red chuckled. "Well, she's sweet on you, that's for sure. She got herself a Dub of you so that's a definite indication. We're going to use that to our advantage. You're going to invite her over for a lovely romantic evening. Then you're going to keep her from leaving. We take over from there. Ms. Moore will be a very lucrative investment for us, as long as Daddy cooperates. And I'm sure he will."

J-1684 nodded. "I understand." Red raised an eyebrow. "I'm glad to hear it. We wouldn't accept any other answer, Mr. Flynn."

#

Lindsay entered in a whirlwind, flushed with pleasure and waving her packages. "Wait until you see this, Vanny! I got the absolute best shoes in town. They're the latest in AlliCroc® in my favorite color! And the little dresses I got are just perfect! I also got lingerie. I feel so pretty!"

Vance suppressed an indulgent smile. Too strange for a subservient robot, no doubt. He would have very fond memories of her once he was safely stowed away in South America. The actor expressed open admiration instead, with what he hoped was robotic yet smooth enough charm to do justice to the realism of DubCorp's technical expertise: "You have lovely taste, Lindsay. They're almost as beautiful as you are."

She stooped to kiss him. An odd gesture, he thought, to display for a robot. His heart constricted in a fleeting feeling of pity. She needed affection and friendship and was getting it from what she thought was a robot: as if this were the only way for her not to be hurt. The capriciousness which had defined her treatment of him had evolved into fondness. Perhaps the companionship he provided, however artificial, gave her the security she needed to soften and grow.

The phone rang, right on cue. Lindsay picked it up after the third ring. "Yes? A what – a defect?"

I didn't notice anything. Unstable? He seems absolutely fine! I don't want to take him back! Just a few hours? Well, in that case, if you really think it's necessary... but I really haven't seen a problem... Alright, call me back later. Tomorrow is good. In the afternoon is better."

She turned to Vance with a frown. "I might have to bring you back. Apparently there's something wrong. A man will be coming over tomorrow if I notice anything." She pouted. "I don't want you to go. They might change something and turn you into someone I don't like! I like you now!"

Vance melted inwardly. Her show of affection and enthusiasm was more spontaneous and genuine than any compliment he remembered from the hundreds of hangers-on who had hounded him the entire time of his success. He wished he could tell her. Then he reminded himself that she liked him in the role he was playing: subservient, pliable, perfect in every way. Not the real him at all, he reflected ruefully. His mind reached back to his previous marriages and countless relationships, in which he had never played the part he did now, instead venting his every annoyance, acting on his every whim and faulting his partners for the slightest imperfection or deviation from cheerful admiration of him. He realized with a start that it was the first time he had ever engaged in this type of introspection. It felt like a revelation. Where would it lead him, once he was gone? He felt suddenly wistful. Alone.

Then, she reached for him and all he could think of was the next moment with her.

#

Red handed the phone to J-1684. "Here's the number for Sareena Bachaandhi. She's a good friend of yours, isn't she? Tell her you heard about the Dub and you think Lindsay is a beautiful girl, so you don't see why you shouldn't get together."

The robot dialed dutifully. Sareena answered and immediately sounded congenial. "Vance? How are you? How did the joke go, by the way? Was Lindsay surprised to see you in person?" The robot, incapable of being puzzled, answered straightforwardly: "Joke? I don't know quite what you're referring to. I haven't met the young lady, but I would certainly love to. She seems quite taken with me, so I don't see why not. Could you speak to her for me and arrange a date?"

Sareena frowned. Why did Vance act as if he'd never switched places with the Dub and gone to Lindsay's apartment? Something was wrong. But what? She had to go to Lindsay's and find out for herself what was happening.

#

Lindsay opened the door with joyful haste. "Sareena! It's great to see you. Come in, please!"

Vance sat on the couch. His heart pounded. What was his friend doing here?

"Well, I have some news for you, my dear!" Sareena's gaze strayed to Vance. "It seems Vance Flynn himself would like to meet you in person! He thinks you're beautiful, from all those pictures he's seen of you."

"Omigosh! No way! That is sooooo amazing! I'm going to meet Vance Flynn? Wow! Yes, yes, yes!!! I can't believe he would pick me, out of all the tens of thousands of women he can choose from! This so great. Let me get you a drink and we'll celebrate!!"

Vance felt an absurd wave of jealousy, then panicked inwardly. The Dub said he wanted to meet her? The gambling dons were behind this and it smelled bad.

He wiggled his eyebrows at Sareena while Lindsay went to the kitchen to fix the drinks. Sareena's eyes widened. She looked in the direction of the kitchen, then back at Vance. However, she had the good sense to say nothing. She grabbed a piece of paper she had in her purse, along with a pen, and wrote out: "Are you the real Vance Flynn?" then held it up to him. He nodded. Sareena's eyebrows shot up in alarm. "What happened?" she scribbled furiously. But before Vance could answer, Lindsay came rushing back out of the kitchen with her news.

"Guess what! Arne Langestrom himself heard about the defects in Vanny, from people on the set of *Ready to Die*, and he's coming over himself to do an inspection! I won't have to wait for that other guy who phoned and Arne might just fix everything right here without moving Vanny. Isn't that great?" She pouted. "The only thing is, I just found out Dubs record every single conversation with their owners, in case of a recall like this. They say it's absolutely confidential but I'm not too happy about it."

Vance cursed inwardly. Wolfe couldn't keep his mouth shut, probably thinking it would be helpful to spread the word so there wouldn't be too much suspicion. The word got out that the Vance Flynn Dub was defective and with Arne Langestrom cruising the set for the stars to Dub, he would have heard. And of course he would check it himself, with Lindsay Moore being one of his absolutely best customers. Damn. Vance cursed himself especially, for not thinking of any ramifications to his plan.

Sareena caught his expression while Lindsay was thankfully oblivious. She turned to the young heiress with a bright smile: "Lindsay, can I talk to you in the kitchen? Those Dubs hear everything and they're terminally candid. They don't have a need-to-know override. Seems it's too complicated to program." She lowered her eyes coyly and glanced at Vince. He was deeply grateful and relieved. Now was the time.

He immediately dialed Wolfe. "Listen. We can't go through with our original plan. Those people want Lindsay to meet me at the house. Something's wrong. She's in danger. We have to do something to stop them."

Wolfe was nonplused. "I thought you hated her for Dubbing you, man. Let the little bitch fry! Why should you care?"

Vance hissed out in irritation and anger: "This is serious. We're looking at a felony, maybe conspiracy, if we don't do anything! It's a result of my own actions!" His more recent feelings for Lindsay, he decided, were best left private.

Wolfe immediately changed his tone. "Oh, man. You're right, of course you're right, Vance. Man, I never thought of that. Good thing you did. What do we do now?"

Vance was categorical. "We have to stay put and switch the Dub by commanding him to take my place, as he was supposed to do. Then I'll deal with those people, like I should have from the start."

Wolfe was obsequious as always. "Of course, Vance. You know best. It's a great plan! Let me know what I can do."

Vance Flynn sighed, struggling to contain his irritation. "Are you sure?"

Wolfe gulped, then tucked at his collar, sweating. "Sure, Vance. I'm there for you!"

"Good", the actor replied. "I'm going to need all the backup I can get." He remembered Lindsay's comments about the holorecording function on the Dubs. "By the way, I overheard something that might be useful. It seems the Dubs are programmed to record their conversations with everyone they meet. Only DubCorp personnel know about it. Until me. I want you to find those recordings and copy them when we get our hands on the Dub."

#

Dressed as a utility repairman thanks to costumes on the set of *Whatever Else*, a romantic comedy-drama about lingering class differences, Wolfe sweated as he knocked on the door of 1544 Ocean View Boulevard. J-1684 answered and Wolfe immediately spoke the override code word. The Dub snapped to attention. "You will follow me now," said the set designer, having mapped out his plan.

The Dub complied as programmed, climbing into Wolfe's vehicle to drive all the way to Lindsay Moore's apartment.

Once they arrived, Wolfe radiated anxiety as he guided the Dub into the hallway, then instructed him to stay back. He knocked on the door. This was a standard scene in many major movies. He had seen actors and actresses do this thousands of times. It should be no problem. He felt like losing his lunch.

Lindsay opened the door. Wolfe smiled automatically: "Hello, Ma'am. I'm sorry to disturb you, but I'm afraid I have to ask you to put out all the lights and appliances, since we're doing a check on the control panel for all your fuses and you might not want any surprises there. It could blow everything!"

Not being schooled in electronics, and having been raised in an environment where nothing ever went wrong this way, Lindsay arched her eyebrows, said "oooo", and complied.

Under cover of total darkness, J-1684 was switched with the real Vance Flynn. Reaching into the Dub's memory banks with every amateur hacker's trick he knew, Wolfe managed to retrieve every conversation he'd had with the would-be kidnappers and made several copies on his handheld, tossing one to Vance.

#

Red was on the couch, chewing his lip with impatience. As soon as Vance walked through the door, the mobster sprang up to chastise him. "Where have you been, Mr. Flynn? We had an arrangement. You should have been in the house. I've been waiting for half an hour."

The actor leaned against the wall, staring daggers at his interlocutor. "I don't know who you are, in particular, but I do know one thing. This ain't gonna happen. You'll have to leave Lindsay Moore well alone."

Red narrowed his eyes disdainfully. "What are you talking about? And what makes you think you can just back out now?"

Vance took a step forward, flicking on a holocorder. Red and J-1684 stood speaking in full colour with perfect sound clarity. "This does," he stated with finality.

Alarmed and confused, Red backed away sputtering: "How... when... "

Vance grinned. "Guess what. The man you were dealing with was the Dub. Seems they have build-in recording devices. But now, he's back where he belongs."

The mob enforcer grabbed a weapon, pointing it at Vance, and headed for the door. "I don't think I'll stick around to see the end of this. Get out of my way."

Flynn shrugged. "Suit yourself."

#

Tapping her foot on the floor, Lindsay sighed. “So where is Arne, anyway? This waiting around is like Chinese water torture.” She glanced at J-1684. Something wasn’t quite right. But this time it was recent. Approaching the Dub, she noticed the colour of his eyes. They were green. Frowning, she took his shirt off. A perfect hairy chest. “Hey. What’s going on?” The Dub looked at her blankly, puzzled. “I don’t know, Lindsay. Is something wrong? Would you like me to sing your favourite Dover Boys song now?”

Lindsay looked him up and down. “Wait. You’ve never sung for me before. I thought you were defective!”

J-1684’s eyes widened in astonishment. “Defective? Of course not, Lindsay. DubCorp specifications are precise and leading-edge. Our rate of error is 0.00006 percent.”

The heiress tossed her hair back and shook her head. “This isn’t right. You’ve changed. In fact, you’re completely different. I want the old you back!” She stamped her foot.

The Dub looked at her helplessly.

A knock sounded on the door. She looked through the spyhole. It was Vance Flynn! She danced with excitement.

“Yes? Come in, please!”

Vance stepped inside the now-familiar apartment. He turned to look at his paramour. “Hi there. I hope you won’t be putting me in the broom closet again.”

Her eyes widened. She looked him up and down. It was Vanny... She blushed a furious crimson and put a hand up to her mouth.

“Oh my God... It was you all along! I want to die!” She started to run, but Vance grabbed her arm.

“I know. I’m sorry. I’ll explain. Please. Give me a chance.”

He bent down to kiss her.

No acting required.